

## THE CHURCH AS SHE SHOULD BE

### NO. 984

A SERMON  
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

*“You are beautiful, O my love, as Tirzah, comely as Jerusalem, terrible as an army with banners.”  
Song of Solomon 6:4.*

THERE are various estimates of the Christian church. Some think everything of her. Some think nothing of her. And probably neither opinion is worth the breath which utters it. Neither Ritualists, who idolize their church, nor skeptics, who vilify all churches, have any such knowledge of the true spiritual church of Jesus Christ as to be entitled to give an opinion. The king’s daughter is all glorious within with a beauty which they are quite unable to appreciate.

What is usually the most correct character which is obtainable of a woman? Shall we be guided by the praises of those neighbors who are on good terms with her, or by the scandal of those who make her the subject of ill-natured gossip? No. The most accurate judgment we are likely to get is that of her husband. Solomon says in the Proverbs concerning the virtuous woman, “Her husband also rises up, and he praises her.”

Of that fairest among women, the church of Christ, the same observation may be made. It is to her of small consequence to be judged of man’s judgment, but it is her honor and joy to stand well in the love and esteem of her royal spouse, the Prince Emmanuel. Though the words before us are allegorical, and the whole song is crowded with metaphor and parable, yet the teaching is plain enough in this instance. It is evident that the divine Bridegroom gives His bride a high place in His heart, and to Him, whatever she may be to others, she is fair, lovely, comely, beautiful, and in the eyes of His love without a spot.

Moreover, even to Him there is not only a beauty of a soft and gentle kind in her, but a majesty, a dignity in her holiness, in her earnestness, in her consecration, which makes even Him say of her that she is “terrible as an army with banners,” “awful as a bannered army.” She is every inch a queen—her aspect in the sight of her beloved is majestic. Take, then, the words of our text as a tribute upon Christ’s church, pronounced by Him who knows her best, and is best able to judge concerning her, and you learn that to His discerning eye she is not weak, dishonorable, and despicable, but bears herself as one of highest rank, consciously, joyously strong in her Lord’s strength.

**I.** On this occasion let us note, first of all, WHY IT IS THAT THE CHURCH OF GOD IS SAID TO BE AN ARMY WITH BANNERS.

That she is *an army* is true enough, for the church is not one, but many, and consists of men who march in order under a common leader, with one design in view, and that design a conflict and a victory. She is the church militant here below, and both in suffering and in service she is made to prove that she is in an enemy’s country. She is contending for the truth against error, for the light against darkness. Till the day breaks and the shadows flee away she must maintain her sentinels and kindle her watch fires. For all around her there is cause to guard against the enemy, and to descend the royal treasure of Gospel truth against its deadly foes.

But why an army *with banners*? Is not this, first of all, for *distinction*? How shall we know to which king an army belongs unless we can see the royal standard? In times of war the nationality of troops is often declared by their distinguishing regimentals. The gray coats of the Russians were well known in the Crimea. The white livery of the Austrians was a constant eyesore in bygone days to the natives of Lombardy. No one mistook the Black Brunswickers for French Guards, or our own Hussars for Garibaldians.

Quite as effectively, armies have been distinguished by the banners which they carried. As the knights of old were recognized by their plume and helmet, and escutcheon, so an army is known by its standard and the national colors. The tricolor of the French readily marked their troops as they fled before the terrible black and white of the German army.

The church of Christ displays its banners for distinction's sake. It desires not to be associated with other armies, or to be mistaken for them, for it is not of this world, and its weapons and its warfare are far other than those of the nations. God forbid that followers of Jesus should be mistaken for political partisans or ambitious adventurers. The church unfurls her ensign to the breeze that all may know whose she is and whom she serves.

This is of the utmost importance at this present time when crafty men are endeavoring to palm off their inventions. Every Christian church should know what it believes, and publicly avow what it maintains. It is our duty to make a clear and distinct declaration of our principles, that our members may know to what intent they have come together, and that the world also may know what we mean.

Far be it from us to join with the Broad Church cry and furl the banners upon which our distinctive colors are displaced. We hear on all sides great outcries against creeds. Are these clamors justifiable? It seems to me that when properly analyzed, most of the protests are not against creeds, but against the truth, for every man who believes anything must have a creed, whether he writes it down and prints it or no. Or if there is a man who believes nothing, or anything, or everything by turns, he is not a fit man to be set up as a model.

Attacks are often made against creeds because they are a short, handy form by which the Christian mind gives expression to its belief, and those who hate creeds do so because they find them to be weapons as inconvenient as bayonets in the hands of British soldiers have been to our enemies. They are weapons so destructive to neology that it protests against them. For this reason, let us be slow to part with them. Let us lay hold of God's truth with an iron grip, and never let it go. After all, there is a Protestantism still worth contending for. There is a Calvinism still worth proclaiming, and a Gospel worth dying for. There is a Christianity distinctive and distinguished from Ritualism, Rationalism, and Legalism, and let us make it known that we believe in it.

Up with your banners, soldiers of the cross! This is not the time to be frightened by the cries against conscientious convictions, which are nowadays nicknamed sectarianism and bigotry. Believe in your hearts what you profess to believe. Proclaim openly and zealously what you know to be the truth. Be not ashamed to say such-and-such things are true, and let men draw the inference that the opposite is false. Whatever the doctrines of the Gospel may be to the rest of mankind, let them be your glory and boast. Display your banners, and let those banners be such as the church of old carried. Unfurl the old primitive standard, the all-victorious standard of the cross of Christ. In very deed and truth—in *hoc signo vinces*—the atonement is the conquering truth. Let others believe as they may, or deny as they will, for us the truth as it is in Jesus is the one thing that has won your hearts and made you a soldier of the cross.

Banners were carried, not merely for distinctiveness, but also to serve the purposes of *discipline*. An army with banners had one banner as a central standard, and then each regiment or battalion displayed its own particular flag. The hosts of God, which so gloriously marched through the wilderness, had their central standard. I suppose it was the very pole upon which Moses lifted up the brazen serpent (at any rate, our brazen serpent is the central ensign of the church). And then, besides that, each tribe of the twelve had its own particular banneret, and with these uplifted in the front, the tribes marched in order so that there was no confusion on the march. And in time of battle there was no difficulty in marshalling the armed men.

It was believed by the later Jews "that the standard of the camp of Judah represented a lion. That of Reuben, a man. That of Joseph, an ox. And that of Dan, an eagle. The Targumists, however, believe that the banners were distinguished by their colors, the color for each tribe being analogous to that of the precious stone for that tribe in the breastplate of the high priest, and that the great standard of each of the four camps combined the three colors of the tribes which composed it."

So, brethren, in the church of God there must be discipline—the discipline not only of admission and of dismissal in receiving the converts and rejecting the hypocrites, but the discipline of marshalling the troops to the service of Christ in the holy war in which we are engaged. Every soldier should have his orders, every officer his troop, every troop its fixed place in the army, and the whole army a regularity such as is prescribed in the rule, “Let all things be done decently and in order.”

As in the ranks each man has his place, and each rank has its particular phase in the battalion, so in every rightly constituted church each man, each woman will have, for himself or herself, his or her own particular form of service, and each form of service will link in with every other, and the whole combined will constitute a force which cannot be broken. A church is not a load of bricks, remember. It is a house built together. A church is not a bundle of cuttings in the gardener’s hand. It is a vine, of which we are the branches.

The true church is an organized whole, and life, *true spiritual life*, wherever it is paramount in the church, without rules and rubrics, is quite sure to create order and arrangement. Order without life reminds us of the rows of graves in a cemetery, all numbered and entered in the register. Order with life reminds us of the long lines of fruit trees in Italy, festooned with fruitful vines. Sunday school teachers, bear you the banner of the folded lamb. Sick visitors, follow the ensign of the open hand. Preachers, rally to the token of the uplifted brazen serpent. And all of you, according to your sacred calling, gather to the name of Jesus, armed for the war.

An army with banners may be also taken to represent *activity*. When an army folds up its colors, the fight is over. Little is being done in military circles when the banners are put away. The troops are on furlough or are resting in barracks. An army with banners is exercising, or marching, or fighting. Probably it is in the middle of a campaign, it is marshaled for offense and defense, and there will be rough work before long.

It is to be feared that some churches have hung up their flags to rot in state or have encased them in dull propriety. They do not desire to do great things, or to see great things. They do not expect many conversions. If many did happen, they would be alarmed and suspicious. They do not expect their pastor’s ministry to be with power, and if it were attended with manifest effect, they would be greatly disturbed, and perhaps would complain that he created too much excitement. The worst of it is that do-nothing churches are usually very jealous lest any should encroach on their domain.

Our churches some time ago appeared to imagine that a whole district of this teeming city belonged to them to cultivate or neglect, as their monopolizing decree might be. If anybody attempted to raise a new interest, or even to build a preaching station within half a mile of them, they resented it as a most pernicious poaching upon their manor. They did nothing themselves and were very much afraid lest anybody should supplant them. Like the lawyers of old, who took away the key of knowledge, they entered not in themselves, and they who were entering in they hindered. That day, it is to be hoped, has gone once for all, yet too much of the old spirit lingers in certain quarters. It is high time that each church should feel that if it does not work, the sole reason for its existence is gone.

The reason for a church being a church of Jesus Christ is its mutual edification, and in the conversion of sinners, and if these two ends are not really answered by a church, it is a mere name, a hindrance, an evil, a nuisance. Like the salt which has lost its savor, it is neither fit for the land nor for the dunghill. May we all in our church fellowship be active in the energy of the Spirit of God. May none of us be dead members of the living body, mere impediments to the royal host, baggage to be dragged rather than warriors pushing on the war.

May we, every one of us, be soldiers filled with vigor to the fullness of our manhood by the eternal power of the Holy Spirit, and may we be resolved that any portion of the church which does not uplift its banner of service shall not long number us among its adherents. Be it ours to determine that whether others will or will not serve God and extend the kingdom of His dear Son, we will, in His name and strength, contend even to the death. Unsheathe your swords, you soldiers of the cross. Arise from your

slumber, you careless ones, gird on your swords and prepare for the war. The Lord has redeemed you by His blood, not that you might sleep, but that you might fight for the glory of His name.

Does not the description, “an army with banners,” imply a degree of *confidence*? It is not an army retiring from the foe, and willing enough to hide its colors to complete its escape. An army that is afraid to venture out into the open, keeps its banners out of the gleam of the sun. Banners uplifted are the sign of a fearlessness which rather courts than declines the conflict.

Ho! warriors of the cross, unfurl the Gospel’s ancient standard to the breeze. We will teach the enemy what strength there is in hands and hearts that rally to the Christ of God. Up with the standard, you brave men at arms. Let all eyes see it. And if the enemy glare like lions on it, we “will call upon the Lion of the tribe of Judah to lead the van, and we will follow with His Word like a two-edged sword in our hands—

*“Stand up! Stand up for Jesus!  
Ye soldiers of the cross!  
Lift high His royal banner;  
It must not suffer loss,  
From victory unto victory  
His army shall He lead,  
Till every foe is vanquish’d  
And Christ is Lord indeed.”*

We cannot place too much reliance in the Gospel. Our weakness is that we are so diffident and so apt to look somewhere else for strength. We do not believe in the Gospel as to its power over the sons of men as we should believe in it. Too often we preach it with a coward’s voice. Have I not heard sermons commencing with abject apologies for the preacher’s daring to open his mouth. Apologies for his youth, for his assertions, for his venturing to intrude upon men’s consciences, and I know not what else? Can God acknowledge ambassadors of this cowardly, cringing breed, who mistake fear of men for humility? will our Captain honor such carpet-knights, who apologize for bearing arms?

I have heard that of old the ambassadors of Holland, and some other states, when introduced to his celestial majesty, the brother of the sun and cousin of the moon, the Emperor of China, were expected to come crawling on their hands and knees up to the throne. But when our ambassadors went to that flowery land, they declined to pay such humiliating homage to his impertinent majesty and informed him that they would stand upright in his presence, as free men should do, or else they would decline all dealings with him, and in all probability his majesty would hear from a cannon’s mouth far less gentle notes than he would care for.

Even thus, though we may well humble ourselves as men, yet as ambassadors of God we cannot crouch to the sons of men to ask them what message would suit them best. It must not, shall not, be that we shall smooth our tongues and tone our doctrines to the taste of the age. The Gospel that we preach, although the worldly wise man despises it, is God’s Gospel for all that.

“Ah,” says he, “there is nothing in it. Science has overthrown it.” “And,” says another, “this Gospel is but so much platitude. We have heard it over and over again.” Ah, sir, and though it is platitude to you, and you decree it to be contemptible, you shall hear it or nothing else from us. “For it is the power of God, and the wisdom of God.” In its simplicity lies its majesty and its power. “We are not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ.” “God forbid that we should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

We will proclaim it again with confidence. We will bring forth once more the selfsame truth as of old. And as the barley loaf smote the tent of Midian, so that it lay along, so shall the Gospel overturn its adversaries. The broken pitcher, and the flaming torches, and the old war cry, “The sword of the LORD, and of Gideon”, shall yet fill the enemy with dismay. Let us be bold for Jesus, and we shall see what His arm can do.

The Gospel is the voice of the eternal God, and has in it the same power as that which brought the world out of nothing, and which shall raise the dead from their graves at the coming of the Son of Man.

The Gospel, the Word of God, can no more return to Him void than can the snow go back to heaven, or the raindrops climb again the path by which they descended from the clouds. Have faith in God's Word, faith in the presence of the Holy Ghost, faith in the reigning Savior, faith in the fulfillment of the everlasting purposes, and you will be full of confidence, and like an army with banners.

Once more, an army with banners may signify the *constancy* and perseverance in holding the truth. We see before us not an army that has lost its banners, or that has suffered its colors to be rent away from it, but an army which bears aloft its ancient standard and swears by it still. Let us be very earnest to maintain the faith once delivered to the saints. Let us not give up this doctrine or that, at the dictates of policy or fashion, but whatsoever Jesus says to us, let us receive it as the Word of life.

Great injury may be done to a church ere it knows it, if it shall tolerate error here and there, for false doctrine, like the little leaven, soon leavens the whole lump. If the church is taught of the Spirit to know the voice of the Good Shepherd, a stranger it will not follow, for it knows not the voice of strangers. This is part of the education which Christ gives to His people, "All your people shall be taught of the LORD." They shall know the truth, and the truth shall make them free.

May we, as a church, hold fast the things which we have learned and have been taught of God, and may we be preserved from the philosophies and refinings of these last days. If we give up the things which are verily believed among us, we shall lose our power, and the enemy alone will be pleased. But if we maintain them, the maintenance of the old faith, by the Spirit of God, shall make us strong in the Lord and in the power of His Might. Wrap the colors round you, you standard bearers in the day of danger, and die sooner than give them up. Life is little compared with God's lovingkindness, and that is the sure heritage of the brave defender of the faith. Thus resolute for truth, the church becomes an army with banners.

**II.** Secondly, the church is said to be TERRIBLE. To whom is she terrible? She should be amiable, and she is. May God grant that our church may never be terrible to young converts by moroseness and uncharitableness. Whenever I hear of candidates being alarmed at coming before our elders, or seeing the pastor, or making a confession of faith before the church, I wish I could say to them, "Dismiss your fears, beloved ones. We shall be glad to see you, and you will find your conversation with us a pleasure rather than a trial."

So far from wishing to repel you, if you really love the Savior, we shall be glad enough to welcome you. If we cannot see in you the evidence of a great change, we shall kindly point out to you our fears, and shall be thrice happy to point you to the Savior. But be sure of this, if you have really believed in Jesus, you shall not find this church terrible to you. Harsh judgments are contrary to the spirit of Christ, and the nature of the Gospel. Where they are the rule, the church is despicable rather than terrible. Bigotry and uncharitableness are indications of weakness, not of strength.

To what and to whom is the church terrible? I answer, first, in a certain sense she is terrible *to all ungodly men*. A true church in her holiness and testimony is very terrible to sinners. The ungodly care not a rush about a mock church, nor about sham Christians, but a really earnest Christian makes the ungodly abashed. We have known some who could not use the foul language which they were accustomed to when they were in the presence of godly men and women, though these persons had no authority or position or rank. even in the most ribald company, when a Christian of known consistency of character has wisely spoken the word of reproof, a solemn abashment comes over the majority of those present, their consciences have borne witness against them, and they have felt how awful goodness is.

Not that we are ever to try and impress others with any dread of us, such an attempt would be ridiculed and end in deserved failure. But the influence which we would describe flows naturally out of a godly life. Majesty of character never lies in affectation of demeanor, but in solidity of virtue. If there be real goodness in us—if we really, fervently, zealously love the right, and hate the evil—the outflow of our life almost without a word will judge the ungodly—and condemn them in their heart of hearts.

Holy living is the weightiest condemnation of sin. We have heard of an ungodly son who could not bear to live in the house where his departed father had in his lifetime so devoutly prayed. Every room, and every piece of furniture reproved him for forsaking his father's God. We have read of others who were

wont to dread the sight of certain godly men whose holy lives held them more in check than the laws of the land.

The bad part of this is that the terror of the ungodly suggests to them an unhallowed retort upon their reprovers and becomes the root out of which springs persecution. Those whom the ungodly fear because they condemn them by their character, they try to put out of the world if they can, or to bespatter them with slander if they cannot smite them with the hand of cruelty. The martyrdom of saints is the result of the darkness hating the light, because the light makes manifest its evil deeds. There will always be in proportion to the real holiness, earnestness, and Christlikeness of a church something terrible in it to the perverse generation in which it is placed. It will dread it as it does the all-revealing day of judgment.

So is there something terrible in a living church to all *errorists*. Just now two armies have encamped against the host of God, opposed to each other, but confederates against the church of God. Ritualism with its superstition, its priest-craft, its sacramental efficacy, its hatred of the doctrines of grace. And on the other side Rationalism, with its sneering unbelief and absurd speculations. These, like Herod and Pilate, agree in nothing but in opposition to Christ. They have one common dread, although they may not confess it.

They do not dread those platform speeches in which they are so furiously denounced at public meetings, nor those philosophical discussions in which they are overthrown by argument. But they hate, but they fear, and therefore abuse and pretend to despise, the prayerful, zealous, plain simple preaching of the truth as it is in Jesus Christ. This is a weapon against which they cannot stand—the weapon of the old Gospel.

In the days of Luther it did marvels. It wrought wonders in the days of Whitefield and Wesley. It has often restored the ark of the Lord to our land, and it will again. It has lost none of its ancient power, and therefore is it the terror of the adversaries of Christ.

*“Thine aspect’s awful majesty  
Does strike Thy foes with fear;  
As armies do when banners fly,  
And martial flags appear.*

*How does Thine armor, glitt’ring bright,  
Their frightened spirits quell!  
The weapons of Thy warlike might  
Defy the gates of hell.”*

Even *to Satan himself* the church of God is terrible. He might, he thinks, deal with individuals, but when these individuals strengthen each other by mutual conversation and prayer, when they are bound to each other in holy love, and make a temple in which Christ dwells, then is Satan hard put to it. O brethren and sisters, it is not every church that is terrible thus, but it is a church of God in which there is the life of God, and the love of God, a church in which there is the uplifted banner, the banner of the cross, held high amid those various bannerets of truthful doctrine and spiritual grace of which I have just now spoken.

**III.** We will make a third point, and that is, WHY IS THE CHURCH OF CHRIST TERRIBLE AS AN ARMY WITH BANNERS?

Why is it terrible because of its banners? The whole passage seems to say that the church is terrible as an army, but that to the fullest degree she owes her terribleness to her banners: “Terrible as an army with banners.” I believe the great banner of the Christian church to be the uplifted Savior. “I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.” Around Him then we gather: “Unto him shall the gathering of the people be.” As the brazen serpent in the midst of the camp in the wilderness, so is the Savior lifted high, our banner. The atoning sacrifice of Christ is the great central standard of all really regenerate men, and this is the main source of dismay to Israel’s foes.



But we shall take the thoughts in order. The church herself is terrible, and then terrible because of her banners. Brethren, the army itself is terrible. Why? First, because it consists of elect people. Remember how Haman's wife inquired concerning Mordecai, whether he belonged to the seed of the Jews? For if he did, then she foretold that her husband's scheme would prove a failure: "If Mordecai be of the seed of the Jews, before whom you have begun to fall, you shall not prevail against him, but shall surely fall before him."

Now, the church of God as made up of men and women is nothing more than any other organization. Look at its exterior, and you see in it few persons of great education and a great many of no education. Here and there a wealthy and powerful person, but hundreds who are poor and despised. It does not possess in itself, naturally, the elements of strength according to ordinary reckoning. Indeed, its own confession is that in itself it is perfect weakness, a flock of sheep among wolves. But here lies its strength, that each of the true members of the church are of the seed royal. They are God's chosen ones, the seed of the woman ordained of old to break the head of Satan and all his serpent seed.

They are the weakness of God, but they are stronger than men. He has determined with the things that are not to bring to nought the things that are. As the Canaanites feared the chosen race of Israel because the rumor of them had gone forth among the people, and the terror of JEHOVAH was upon them, so is it with the hosts of evil. They have dreamed their dreams, as the Midianite did, and valiant men like Gideon can hear them telling it. The barley cake shall fall upon the royal tent of Gideon, and smite it till it lies along. The sword of the Lord, and of Gideon, shall rout the foe. The elect shall overcome through the blood of the Lamb, and none shall say them nay. You are a royal priesthood, a peculiar people, a chosen generation, and in you the living God will gloriously declare His sovereign grace.

The church, again, consists of a *praying* people. Now prayer is that which links weakness with infinite strength. A people who can pray can never be overcome, because their reserve forces can never be exhausted. Go into battle, my brother, and if you are vanquished with the strength you have, prayer shall call up another legion, yea, twenty legions of angels, and the foe shall marvel to see undefeated adversaries still holding the field. If ten thousand saints were burned tomorrow, their dying prayers would make the church rise like a phoenix from her ashes. Who, therefore, can stand against a people whose prayers enlist God in their quarrel? "The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge." We cry unto the Lord, and He hears us. He breaks through the ranks of the foe. He gives us triumph in the day of battle, therefore, terrible as an army with banners are those who wield the weapon of all-prayer.

Again, a true church is *based upon eternal truth*. I need not quote to you the old Latin proverb which says that truth is mighty and must prevail. Truth is, and truth shall be. It alone is substance and must outlast the lapse of ages. Lies are soon swollen to their perfection of development, like the bubbles with rainbow hues which children blow, but they are dispersed as easily as they are fashioned. They are children of the hour, while truth is the offspring and heir of eternity.

Falsehood dies, pierced through the heart by the arrows of time, but truth, in her impenetrable mail bids defiance to all foes. Men who love the truth are building with gold, and silver, and precious stones, and though their architecture may progress but slowly, it is built for eternity. Ramparts of truth may often be assailed, but they will never be carried by the foe. Establish a power among men of the most ostentatious and apparently stable kind, but rest assured that if untruth be at the root of it, it must perish sooner or later. Only the truth is invincible, eternal, supreme. The fear of the true church and the dread thereof falls upon the enemy, because they have not wit enough left to know that the truth has an abiding and indestructible power.

I was very much amused, the other day, to read a criticism by an eminent infidel, whose name would be well-known if I were to mention it, in which he speaks very highly of the exceeding great skill and wisdom, and common sense always exhibited in the arrangements of the Roman Catholic church in opposition to infidelity, and of the imbecility and childishness manifested by Christian ministers in assailing Rationalism with their dogmatism, etc. I was very glad to receive information so valuable, and I thought, "I see, my friend, what kind of warfare you like best. You admire the Roman Catholic kind of

fighting, but you do not admire that which evangelical ministers have adopted. It is no aim of ours to please our enemies in our mode of warfare, but the reverse. And if we have discovered a weapon which galls you, we will use that same arm more freely than ever.”

There is a story of an officer who was rather awkward in his manners, and upon some great occasion, almost fell over his sword in his haste. His Majesty remarked, “Your sword seems to be very much in the way.” “So Your Majesty’s enemies have very often felt,” was the reply. So, when the enemies of the truth are finding fault with our procedure, we accept their verdict when we have turned it the other way upwards. If they do not admire our mode of warfare, we think it is in all probability about the best method we could adopt.

We would still, God granting us help, continue preaching the “foolishness” of the Gospel, and deliver again and again the old truth that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them. Instead of lifting up a new banner (which would better please our adversaries), it shall be the old banner still, “None but Christ.” “By grace are you saved through faith, and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God.” salvation is by free favor, through the expiatory sacrifice of Jesus Christ our Lord.

We are now to observe that the chief glory and majesty of the church lies mainly in the banner which she carries. What cause for terror is there in the banner? We reply the enemies of Christ dread the cross, because they know what the cross has done. Wherever the crucified Jesus has been preached, false systems have tottered to their fall. Dagon has always fallen before the ark of the Lord. Rage the most violent is excited by the doctrine of the atonement, a rage in which the first cause for wrath is fear.

The terribleness of the church lies in her banners, because those banners put strength into her. Drawing near to the standard of the cross, the weakest soldier becomes strong. He who might have played the coward becomes a hero when the precious blood of Jesus is felt with His power in his soul. Martyrs are born and nurtured at the cross. It is the blood of Jesus which is the lifeblood of self-denial. We can die because our Savior died. The presence of Alexander made the Greeks more than giants, the presence of our Redeemer makes believers swifter than eagles, and stronger than lions.

Moreover, the powers of evil tremble at the old standard, because they have a presentiment of its future complete triumph. It is decreed of God, and fixed by His predestinating purpose, that all flesh shall see the salvation of God. Jesus must reign. The crucified One must conquer. The hands nailed to the wood must sway the scepter of all kingdoms. Like potters’ vessels dashed to pieces, must all the might and majesty of men be that shall oppose the crown and scepter of Christ’s kingdom. In Christ preached lies the battle-ax and weapons of war with which the Lord will work out His everlasting decrees. The church with the name of Immanuel emblazoned on her banner, which it is her duty to keep well displayed and lifted high, is sure to be terrible to all the powers of darkness.

We will close with one or two reflections. Will each one here say to himself, “An army, a company of warriors, am I one of them? Am I a soldier? I have entered the church. I make a profession, but am I really a soldier? Do I fight? Do I endure hardness? Am I a mere carpet-knight. A mere lie-in-bed soldier, one of those who are pleased to put on regimentals in order to adorn myself with a profession without ever going to the war?”

*“Am I a soldier of the cross,  
A follower of the Lamb?”*

Pass the question round, my dear brethren and sisters. Are you soldiers who engage in actual fighting for Jesus under His banner? Do you rally round it? Do you know the standard? Do you love it? Could you die in defense of it? Is the person of Jesus dearest of all things to you? Do you value the doctrine of the atoning substitution? Do you feel your own energy and power awakened in the defense of that, and for the love of that? Let not one go away without making the searching question.

And then “terrible.” Am I in any way terrible through being a Christian? Is there any power in my life that would condemn a sinner? Any holiness about me that would make a wicked man feel ill at ease in my



company? Is there enough of Christ about my life to make me like a light in the midst of the darkness? Or is it very likely that if I were to live in a house, the inhabitants would never see any difference between me and the ungodly? Oh, how many Christians there are who need to wear a label round their necks, you would never know that they were Christians without it! They make long prayers and great pretences, but they are Christians in nothing but the name. May your life and mine never be thus despicable, but may we convince gainsayers that there is a power in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and make them confess that they, not having it, are losing a great blessing.

One other thought. If I am not a soldier. If I am not a servant of Christ in very truth, and yet I come to the place of worship where Christians meet, and where Christ is preached, the day will be when the church of God will be very terrible to me. I will suppose that there is a person listening to this sermon who has been hearing the preaching of the Word in this place now for many years. Imagine that the last day is come. You are brought before the great judgment seat, and this is the question, "Did this sinner hear the Gospel faithfully preached? He is ungodly, he has rejected Christ, does he deserve to be cast away? Did he really hear the Gospel, and did he reject it?"

If I am asked to give my witness, I must say, "To the best of my ability, I tried to tell him the Gospel of Jesus Christ." "Was this sinner prayed for by the church?" There are many of the members of this church who would feel bound to declare, "Yes, Lord, we did pray for him." Yes, and all of us would say, "If we did not pray for him by name, we included him in the general company of those who attended upon the means of grace, for whom we made a constant intercession."

Is there any member of the church who would be able to make an apology for the rejecter of Christ? He has willfully rejected the Savior, he knowingly continued in sin. Will anybody be an advocate for him? Not one tongue would be able to excuse you at the judgment, or to argue against the righteous sentence of God. When the great Judge condemns the sinner to be taken away to execution, the whole church with whom that sinner has worshipped, and in whose presence that sinner has rejected Christ, will become "terrible as an army with banners," for all its voices will say, "Amen, Amen, Amen! You are righteous, O Lord."

This is no picture drawn from fancy. Know you not that the saints shall judge the world? They shall sit as co-assessors with the Son of God at the last great assize, and shall say, "Amen!" to every verdict which proceeds from His mouth. O that the thought of this might be blessed of God's Spirit so as to lead many of you to be reconciled to God. Jesus is still the loving Mediator, and a full surrender of yourselves to Him will assuredly save you. Whosoever believes on Him is not condemned. And this is to believe on Him—that you trust in Him, and know that God has given unto us eternal life—and this life is in His Son who suffered in the place of sinners, that whosoever believes in Him might not perish, but have everlasting life. The Lord bless you, for the Lord Jesus' sake. Amen.

[MR. SPURGEON has been laid aside by sickness for two Sabbaths, but is now recovering and hopes to be again in the pulpit next Lord's-day. He earnestly begs the prayers of loving friends that his frequent infirmities may be sanctified to the glory of God and the profit of the church, and then, if it were the Lord's will, effectually removed.]

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Taken from The C. H. Spurgeon Collection, Version 1.0, Ages Software. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at [www.spurgeongems.org](http://www.spurgeongems.org).